

Testimony of Deanna Antrim-Spencer
Before the Senate Commerce Committee
July 28, 1999

Good afternoon, Senator Ashcroft and members of the Committee. My name is Deanna Antrim-Spencer. I am 69 years old, and live in Silver Spring, Maryland, in a community called Leisure World. I am here today to tell you about frauds perpetrated against me, and what the effect has been on my life.

In August of 1997, I entered one of the many sweepstakes that came to me in the mail. Soon I received great volumes of mail, offering travel, magazines, books, etc. The bombardment of letters heralding how much money I am eligible to win, never stopped. The brochures told me that by paying a certain amount — \$19.99, \$24.99— my eligibility to win the \$1 million, \$3 million, etc., increases. I sent away a total of \$1500 to various award distribution centers, but I never won a penny.

A year ago, a man claiming to be from a company called Intercontinental Telecommunication Services called me and offered me the chance to buy tickets for the Australian Lottery at a cost of \$12.99. Although I told him I wasn't sure it was legal to sell those tickets in this country, he called repeatedly in all odd hours of the day. I finally agreed, thinking \$12.99 won't exhaust my small budget. When I got my bill, I was shocked to see that there was a charge for \$1299.00 for tickets to Riga, Latvia. They had forged my signature. After that, calls from various lotteries from other countries came on a daily basis, intensifying.

One day, I happened to turn on the Sally Jesse Raphael Show and saw a phone number for people to call who have been swindled by these fraudulent sweepstakes companies. I called the number and an answering machine saying it was the Sally Jesse Raphael show picked up. I left a message concerning my situation. Less than ten minutes later, I received a call from a Mr. Stuart Hall, who said I was victimized by the various sweepstakes who, according to him, were crooks. I felt this was all true. But, there was good news, he claimed. I will receive a settlement for my troubles, my share of \$96 million, to be distributed by the law firm of Foster, Jackson and Associates to claimants. He said this is the place my name came up on their computer. The settlement to be received was stated as \$110,000. Not believing that this could be true, I declined his offer.

A few days later, another person from the law firm called. He said that the money that I was to be awarded was coming from Canada to prevent unauthorized persons from handing in claims. He gave me a file number, and assured me that he is the attorney in possession of my confidential file and that he could be trusted. However, in order to receive the settlement I first had to pay the Canadian taxes in the amount of \$3000. Reluctantly, I mailed a cashier's check for the amount of \$3000 to them. However, that night I had a bad feeling about the situation and canceled the check the next day.

At this point, I thought that would be the end of it. I didn't realize that they would get so aggressive.

Mr. Mike Davis called me and told me that I was foolish for not taking this great opportunity. He told me that he had seen the check with my name on it and all I had to do was send the \$3000, which I did the next day, and the money would be delivered. At this point, I had already lost a substantial amount of money and had hopes that I could recover it. Shortly, thereafter, another person from the firm called and said that they needed \$30,000 to get the money through Canadian authorities. I said, "Listen, I don't have that much money." They asked how much I did have. After cashing in a CD and withdrawing money from my credit card, I sent them \$11,000.

I have attached a copy of my letter to the Maryland Attorney General where I tell more about how they kept calling, and how detailed their stories were, which finally convinced me to send the money. I thought maybe I'd have enough money to close in my patio, so I could paint like I used to do.

But you know, they also made me afraid of them. They told me one time they would send an armored car. When I told them I lived in a gated community and they might not be able to get in, they said "Oh, don't worry. We can get to you." And so I also didn't want to make them mad.

Well, after they received that check, they told me that my delivery would be on January 11, 1999. John Taylor and Mike Davis called me then to say that the delivery would be postponed until after they came back from vacation on January 18, 1999. Waiting for those two weeks was agonizing. On January 19, 1999, Mike Davis called to say that the delivery had been impossible because of weather but it would occur January 27 between 12:00 and 5:00 p.m.

When the money did not come, I realized that I had been swindled and I felt like I would die. For two days I could hardly get out of bed. I was a nervous wreck. All together I lost about \$20,000. It just makes me sick to think about it.

In fact, I think it did make me sick. Right after this happened, and I knew the money was gone, I got pneumonia, and I just couldn't seem to get out of it. I got three pneumonias, one right after the other. I was sick for five weeks.

The money that was lost, I just can't tell you how important that was to me. That was the money I used for all my living expenses beyond what I pay for my cooperative. It was my money for food, for medicine, for clothes. Since that time, I have been living on the \$3000 from the one check that I stopped, so you know I live carefully. Now, I am going to have to get a job. I tried to get a loan on my house, but it's a cooperative, so the bank turned me down. This fraud has left me totally destitute.

I am trying to find a job. I have an international law degree, I have a journalism degree, and other degrees. I was a photojournalist for many years. But now, I need to find a job where I don't have to drive too much. I would like to work as a consultant from my home.

I still get hundreds of these offers. Sometimes I get as many as 15 to 20 in the mail in one day, and phone calls, too. It really makes me angry. You know, I am worried all the time about money. I don't know what to do.

I know that these crooks target senior citizens, because my neighbors have been contacted by similar entities. I hope that you can figure out some way to stop them or to help people like me who get caught by them.

Thank you for your time this afternoon.

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